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## HOUSEHOLD ART IN PHILADELPHIA.

BY F. H. WILLIAMS.

AMONG the recent movements in household art few have been more noteworthy than the widespread revival in the city of Philadelphia. As is usually the case in sudden alterations of the direction of taste, the changes introduced seven years ago, and which found their immediate impetus in the International Exhibition, speedily resulted in a social revolution from which sooner or later reaction was inevitable. The reaction came when it was found that the change had been too radical, or rather, that in the desire to reach something other than the uglinesses of the past, both architects and decorators had gone ahead recklessly, and had not bestowed sufficient thought on surrounding conditions. If a villa was to be "modernized" (which in this case means put back a century and a half), the architect got up a pretty diagram of a piazza with low hand-worked balustrades and posts grouped in triplets. He ordered the old verandah to be torn away, lowered the roof eighteen inches, turned every curve into an angle, and every oblong space into a square one. In short, he sought every means to do away with that impression of *loftiness* which it had been the especial aim of his predecessor to attain. Then he abjured neutral colorings, except as the mere foil or background for his pronounced contrasts in the decoration. He darkened all his tints and made a free use of primary colors, not only at points where high lights were required, but in recesses and other places falling into natural shadow.

If the elevation were such as to render a flight of steps necessary, the difficulty was surmounted by grading up to the piazza level, and thus a low-browed effect was reached, at least so far as the ground-floor of the villa was concerned. And this brings us to the very head and front of the architect's offending. It is not to be gainsaid that the low, broad piazza, with its near eaves and homelike corners, was in every way more beautiful than the barn-like excrescence which it displaced. But the misfortune was that the architect had seemingly been quite oblivious to the rest of the house; he had not seen that the ungainly distances between the stories would be intensified by the compressed height of the piazza, and that the flaring eaves of the building, concealing every vestige of a roof, could never be brought into harmony with the more tasteful proportions of the addition. Hence the net result of the alteration was incongruity, and the *tout ensemble* unpleasant. It took some time for public opinion to reach this point, and it was not until it had been reached that the reaction of which I have spoken set in. It was then that a halt was made, and people began studying how they could beautify their dwellings rather than how they could plaster on an oriel window or get a Queen Anne piazza. It came to be realized that there were many houses which no amount of mere alteration could bring into conformity with the new standards of taste, and many more which could only be so conformed by changes *throughout*—changes which should have continual reference to one another and be carried forward with a view to harmony in the total effect.

It is very gratifying to note how wide this true revival now is, and on what broad lines it is moving. Owing to the geographical position of Philadelphia, the city is capable of extending its area in proportion to the extension of its population, and hence is reaching out rapidly towards its suburbs, presenting nearly unbroken vistas of dwellings, which alter by insensible gradations from the typical town house, narrow and deep, to the country house, which as we have seen, tends to conform to the old English architecture, and has

at last reached a stage of thoroughly harmonious development.

And, indeed, it is in these suburban residences that the best opportunity is afforded for wealth to prove that it is guided by taste. Deeply recessed windows are capable of receiving an added beauty from an upholsterer, when they open on the closely cropped green of a lawn and admit of a glimpse of overhanging branch or clinging vine, and the whole idea of *home* seems to reach its most perfect realization when withdrawn—if only by a few miles—from the turmoil and density of town. This idea appears as the guiding principle in most of the higher class of dwellings in Germantown, Frankford, Bryn Mawr, and the other suburbs of

bring it about. It was the work of time and the gradual awaking to what was best and truest in foreign esthetic taste. That Philadelphia—essentially the city of homes—should have shown especial susceptibility to the new influences is not to be wondered at, for it is characteristic of the place to seek for the first gratification of luxurious taste within the walls of the dwelling, rather than in the external glitter of magnificent equipages and personal adornments. No sooner had a new and loftier standard of household art been proclaimed than the resources of the wealthier classes were applied to its immediate realization. How great has been the success can only be realized by one who has made a personal investigation of the present condition of home life, and

instituted a comparison with the state of things ten years ago. And it is noticeable, moreover, that the popular wave has extended to the outermost edges of society, the poorer class of laboring men, possessing usually an individual home and having acquired the habit of regarding a hearthstone as a part of the inalienable heritage of man, have come to realize the possibility of adapting the humblest dwellings to the necessities of beauty. One sees a touch of refinement in the cheap china vase which contains its bunch of daisies and honeysuckle, and claims share of the sunlight in the window of the living-room. Here there is a tidy over the back of a plain wooden rocking-chair; there, under the lamp, is a mat with a pretty rose or stem of cherries worked upon it, or perhaps a little cardboard match-holder suspended from the mantel and breaking the rigidity of its long bare lines. Now, none of these things indicate any improvement in mere material condition; they cost comparatively nothing, and the owner might have possessed them any time these ten years; his chairs are no softer for the tidies, nor are his wooden mantels any more like marble by virtue of the match-holders. It would have cost him no effort to have these trifles long ago; but then, as a matter of fact, *he didn't have them*. It was not until a popular movement had awakened within him a dim sense of the beautiful that he could possibly feel any need for those *etcetera* which, while having a distinctive use and economic purpose, were yet without the sphere of daily necessities. Then, again, the decadence of the fancy for violently colored prints and impossible landscapes is a sure indication of the changed state of taste among the laboring people.

Those monstrosities of color which used to stare at you from cheap frames have almost entirely disappeared and their places have been filled by other pictures (cheap chromos mostly) which, while certainly not high art, violate none of the fundamental laws of color and perspective, and do not pain the eye by an offence against the established contrasts of nature. It is true that these things are false, in that they pretend to be something other than

what they are, but they are only false in the sense that any imitation is so; they have the same claim to respect that a ceiling papered to represent fresco, or a bit of woodwork grained by the painter has; and the fact that the rejection of impossible contrasts has grown to be instinctive, is certainly a marked advance and a sure indication of the artistic change which we have been discussing.

No surer proof of the correctness of present artistic ideas in Philadelphia can be obtained than by a tour of inspection through the leading furniture and upholstery warerooms of the city. Everywhere may be seen the results of appreciation of higher needs, and of that principle which makes applicability to human use the prime factor in all handiwork; and it would seem reasonable to indulge the hope that the somewhat spasmodic movements of the past few years have at last resulted in a really excellent standard of household art.



DECORATORS DESIGNS FOR BORDERS.

Philadelphia. It dominates everything, from external architectural structure to the minutiae of the furniture. It is true that elegance is not forgotten; but it is always unconscious elegance, or rather that higher type of art which is able to conceal art. Sofas are placed at such angles with the windows as to permit a lounge to read from them without damaging his eyes; easels are posed with reference to the picture upon them rather than with a view to showing off the wood-carving; footstools are placed where they can be used rather than where they can be stumbled over, and a general air of daily human use is imparted to everything, so that one feels that the furniture was made for man, rather than as formerly, that man was made for the furniture.

To have reached even this stage in the evolution of a catholic household art is no small matter of self-gratulation, for it took more than all the preaching of all the Morris and Burne-Joneses to